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DHS will tie new grants to interoperability standards

By William Welsh
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To improve voice and data interoperability among state and local first-response systems, the Homeland Security Department plans to require governments seeking grants for such applications to adhere to specific technical standards and protocols.

"Even more important than technology standards are the processes and procedures related to interoperability," Homeland Security CIO Steve Cooper said today during the second day of a two-day DHS Industry Forum in Washington.

The department wants to promote interoperability, especially in using mobile radio and geospatial data, Cooper said. He also urged industry to give protocol issues attention when developing tools for state and local users.

The federal government so far has provided \$8 billion to state and local governments for homeland security programs. President Bush's fiscal 2005 budget proposal would give such programs another \$5 billion.

In his presentation, Cooper reviewed initiatives related to information sharing, a top priority for the department this year. DHS is expanding the network that provides warnings and alerts to state and local governments, he said.

The department is replacing the Joint Regional Information Exchange System, an encrypted virtual private network used for distributing threat information, with the just launched Homeland Information Security Network ([Click for Feb. 24 GCN story](#)).

Besides providing alerts and threat information to state emergency operations centers, the new network will send the information to the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas as well as to all 56 state and territorial governments, Cooper said. The department plans to connect the additional users this year, he said.

"The Homeland Information Security Network will be the primary network for information sharing" about counterterrorism issues across all levels of government, Cooper said.

William Welsh writes for [Washington Technology](#) magazine.